

THE HIND IN THE WOOD.

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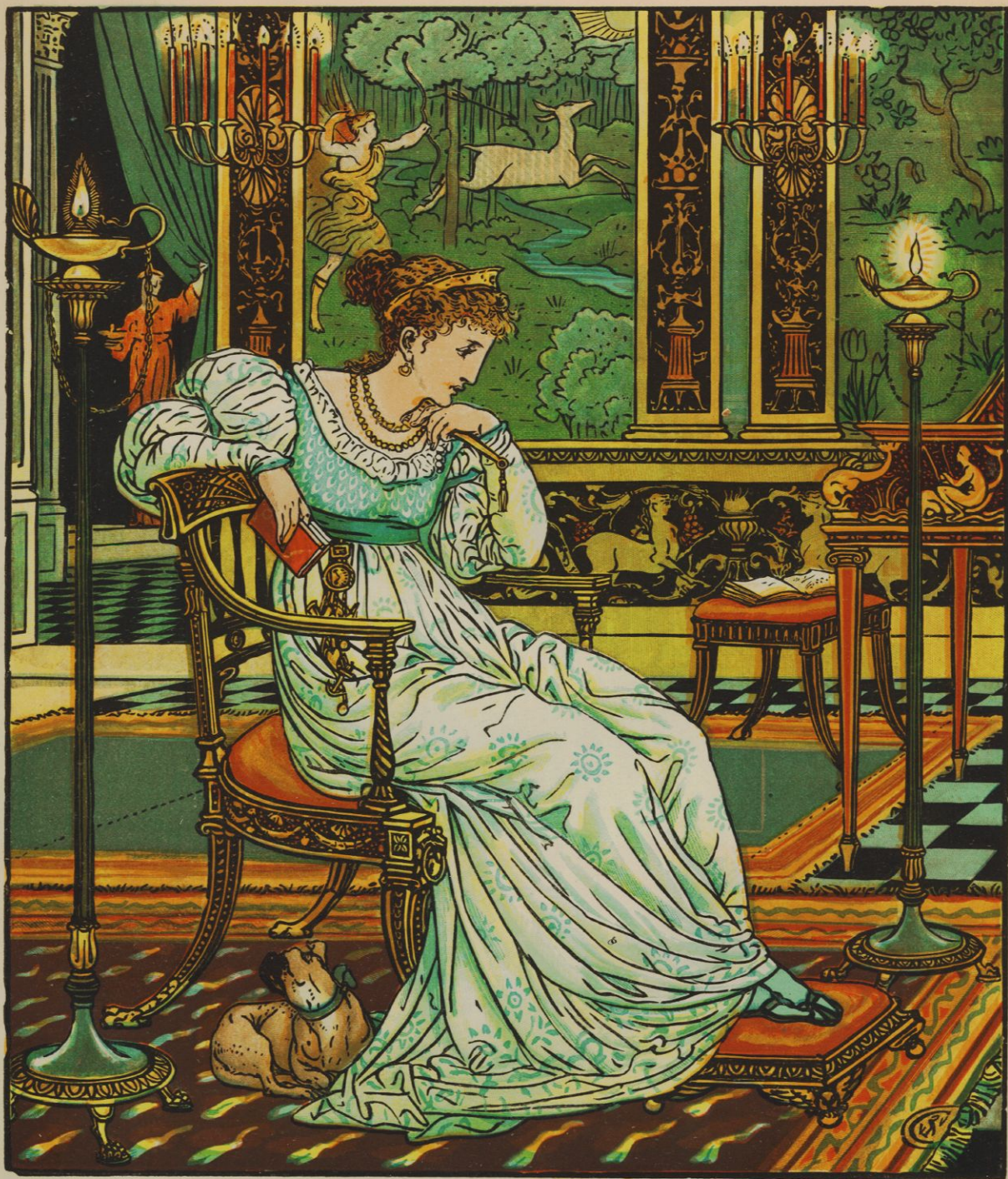
ONCE upon a time there was a King and Queen who were very happy together, but great regret was felt that they had no heir. One day when the Queen was sitting by a fountain, a large crab appeared, and said, "Great Queen, you shall have your wish." The crab then changed into a handsome little old woman, and walked out of the fountain without being wetted. She conducted the Queen through a path in the wood which she had never seen before, although she had been in the wood a thousand times.

The Queen's astonishment was increased by the sight of a palace of diamonds. The gates opened, and six fairies issued forth. They all made a courtesy to the Queen, and each presented her with a flower of precious stones. There was a rose, a tulip, an anemone, a columbine, a carnation, and a pomegranate. "Madam," said they, "we are delighted to announce to you that you will have a beautiful Princess, whom you will call Désirée. Send for us the moment she is born, for we wish to endow her with all good qualities; hold the bouquet, and name each flower, thinking of us, and we shall be instantly in your chamber."

The Queen returned to court, and soon after a Princess was born, whom she named Désirée; she took the bouquet, named the flowers one after another, and all the fairies arrived. They took the little Princess upon their knees and kissed her, one endowing her with virtue, another with wit, a third with beauty, the next with good fortune, the fifth with continual health, and the last with the gift of doing everything well which she undertook.

The Queen thanked them for the favours conferred upon the little Princess, when there entered so large a crab that the door was scarcely wide enough for her to pass through. "Ah! ungrateful Queen," said the crab, "have you so soon forgotten the Fairy of the Fountain, and the service I rendered you by introducing you to my sisters! You have summoned them all, and I alone am neglected!" The Queen asked her pardon; and the fairies, who feared she would endow the child with misery and misfortune, seconded the Queen's endeavours to appease her. "Very well," said she; "I will not do all the mischief to Désirée I had intended. However, I warn you that if she sees the light of day before she is fifteen, it will perhaps cost her her life."





As soon as the crab had left, the Queen asked the fairies to preserve her daughter from the threatened evil, and they decided to build a palace without doors or windows, and to educate the Princess there till the fatal period should have expired. Three taps of a wand produced this grand edifice, in which there was no light but that of wax candles and lamps; but there were so many of these that it was as light as day. The Princess's intelligence and skill enabled her to learn very quickly, while her wit and beauty charmed everybody; the Queen would never have lost sight of her, if her duty had not obliged her to be near the King. The good fairies every now and then went to see the Princess. As the time drew near for her to leave the palace, the Queen had her portrait taken, and sent it to the greatest courts of the world. There was not a prince who did not admire it; but there was one who could never leave it. He shut himself up, and talked to it as though it could understand him. The King, who now hardly ever saw his son, inquired what prevented his appearing as cheerful as usual. Some courtiers told him they feared the Prince would go out of his mind; for he remained whole days shut up in his room, talking as though he had some lady with him. The King sent for his son, and asked him why he was so altered. The Prince threw himself at his father's feet, and said, "I confess that I am desperately in love with Princess Désirée, and wish to marry her." He ran for the portrait, and brought it to the King, who said, "Ah! my dear Guerrier, I consent to your wish. I shall become young again when I have so lovely a Princess at my court."

The Prince begged the King to send an ambassador to Princess Désirée; and Becafigue, a very eloquent young nobleman, was selected.

The ambassador took his leave of the Prince, who said, "Remember, my dear Becafigue, that my life depends upon this marriage. Omit no means of bringing the lovely Princess back with you."

The ambassador took with him many presents for the Princess, and also a portrait of the Prince.

On his arrival, the King and Queen were enchanted; they had heard of Prince Guerrier's personal merits, and were well content to have found a husband for their daughter so worthy of her.

The King and Queen resolved that the ambassador should see Désirée, but the Fairy Tulip said to the Queen, "Take care, Madam, that you do not introduce Becafigue to the Princess; he must not see her yet, and do not consent to let her go until she is fifteen years old; for if she quit her palace before then some misfortune will befall her." And the Queen promised to follow her advice.

On the ambassador's arrival, he asked to see the Princess, and was surprised that that favour was denied him. "It is no caprice of ours, my Lord Becafigue,"

said the King, "that induces us to refuse a request which you are perfectly justified in making;" and he then related to the ambassador the Princess's extraordinary adventure.

The Queen had not yet spoken to her daughter of what was passing; but the Princess knew a great marriage was in agitation for her.

The ambassador, finding his endeavours to obtain the Princess were useless, took leave of the King, and returned. When the Prince found he could not hope to see his dear Désirée for more than three months, he fell dangerously ill. The King was in despair, and resolved to go to the father and mother of Désirée, and entreat them no longer to defer the marriage.

During all this time Désirée had scarcely less pleasure in looking at the Prince's portrait than he had in gazing at hers. And her attendants did not fail to discover this—amongst others, Giroflée and Longue-épine, her maids of honour. Giroflée loved her dearly, and was faithful; but Longue-épine had always nourished a secret jealousy of her. Her mother had been the Princess's governess, and was now her principal lady-in-waiting, but as she doted on her own daughter, she could not wish well to Désirée.

The ambassador Becafigue again posted with the greatest speed to the city where Désirée's father resided, and assured the King and Queen that Prince Guerrier would die if they refused him their daughter any longer. At last they promised him that before evening he should know what could be done in the matter. The Queen went to her daughter's palace, and told her all that had passed. Désirée's grief was very great, but the Queen said, "Do not distress yourself, my dear child; you are able to cure him. I am only uneasy on account of the threats of the Fairy of the Fountain." "Could I not go in a coach," replied she, "so closely shut up that I could not see daylight? They might open it at night, to give me something to eat, and I should thus arrive safely at the palace of Prince Guerrier."

The King and Queen fancied this expedient very much; and they sent for Becafigue, telling him the Princess should set out instantly. The ambassador thanked their Majesties, and again returned to the Prince.

A coach was built, lined with pink and silver brocade. There were no glass windows in it; and one of the first noblemen in the kingdom had charge of the keys. And Désirée was locked up in the coach, with her principal lady-in-waiting, Longue-épine, and Giroflée. Longue-épine did not like the Princess; and was in love with Prince Guerrier, whose likeness she had seen. When upon the point of setting out she told her mother she should die if the Princess's marriage took place; and the lady-in-waiting said she would endeavour to prevent it.

The King and Queen felt no uneasiness for their daughter; but Longue-





épine, who learned each night from the Princess's officers the progress they were making, urged her mother to execute her plans. So about midday, when the sun's rays were at their height, she suddenly cut the roof of the coach with a large knife. Then, for the first time, Princess Désirée saw the light of day. She had scarcely looked at it, and heaved a deep sigh, when she sprang from the coach in the form of a White Hind, and bounded off to the forest, where she hid herself in a dark covert.

The Fairy of the Fountain, who had brought about this event, seemed bent on the destruction of the world. Thunder and lightning terrified the boldest, and no one remained but the lady-in-waiting, Longue-épine, and Giroflée, the latter of whom ran after her mistress. The two others lost not a moment in executing their project. Longue-épine dressed herself in Désirée's richest apparel, and followed by her mother, set forth towards the city, and were met by the King and his son. The King, advancing with all his court, joined the false Princess; but the moment he saw her, he gave a cry, and fell back. "What do I see?" said he. "Sire," said the lady-in-waiting, boldly advancing, "this is the Princess Désirée, with letters from the King and Queen. I also deliver into your hands the casket of jewels which they gave me on setting out."

The King heard this in sullen silence, and the Prince, leaning upon Becafigue, approached Longue-épine, who was as ugly as Désirée was beautiful.

Struck with astonishment, "I am betrayed," cried he, addressing himself to the King. "What mean you, my lord?" said Longue-épine; "know that you will never be deceived in marrying me." The King and Prince did not answer her; they each remounted their litters, one of the body-guards placed the sham Princess behind him, and the lady-in-waiting was similarly treated; they were then carried into the city, and were shut up in a castle.

Prince Guerrier was so overwhelmed by the shock that he could no longer endure the court, and determined to leave it secretly, to seek out some solitary place wherein to pass the remainder of his sad life. He communicated his plan to Becafigue; who, he felt persuaded, would follow him anywhere. He left upon his table a long letter for the King, assuring him that the moment his mind was more at ease he would return.

While everybody endeavoured to console the King, the Prince and Becafigue sped away, and at the end of three days found themselves in a vast forest, where the Prince, who was still ill, dismounted, while Becafigue went to seek for some fruits for their refreshment.

It is a long time since we left the Hind in the Wood. The Fairy Tulip felt for her misfortune; and conducted Giroflée towards the forest, that she might console the Princess. Giroflée was looking for her dear mistress, when the hind saw her, and leaping a brook, ran up eagerly and caressed her a thousand

times. Giroflée looked at it earnestly, and could not doubt that it was her dear Princess. Their tears affected the Fairy Tulip, who suddenly appeared. Giroflée entreated her to restore Désirée to her natural form. "I cannot do that," said Tulip; "but I can shorten her term of punishment; and to soften it, as soon as day gives place to night, she shall quit the form of a hind—but, as soon as it is dawn, she must return to it, and roam the plains and forests like the other animals."

"Proceed by this path," continued she, "and you will come to a little hut." So saying, she disappeared. Giroflée followed her directions, and found an old woman seated upon the step of the door finishing an osier basket. She led them into a very pretty room, in which were two little beds. As soon as it was quite dark, Désirée ceased to be a hind; she embraced Giroflée, and promised that she would reward her the moment her penance had ended. The old woman knocked at their door, and gave them some fruit. They then went to bed, and as soon as daylight appeared, Désirée, having become a hind again, plunged into the wood. Meanwhile Becafigue arrived at the cottage and asked the old woman for several things his master wanted. She filled a basket for him, and offered them shelter for the night, which was accepted.

The Prince slept restlessly, and as soon as it was day he arose and went into the forest. After he had walked for some time a hind started off, and he let fly an arrow at her. This hind was no other than Désirée, but her friend Tulip preserved her from being struck. She felt very tired, as such exercise was quite new to her. At last the Prince lost sight of her, and being fatigued himself, gave up the pursuit.

The next day the Prince again went to the forest, determined that the hind should not escape him. He walked about for some time, and, being much heated, he lay down and fell into a sleep; and while he was sleeping the hind came to the spot. She crouched down a little distance from him and touched him, when he awoke. His surprise was great; she ran off with all her might, and he followed her. At length she could run no longer, and the Prince came up to her with delight. He saw she had lost all her strength, so he cut some branches from the trees, covered them with moss, and placing her gently upon the boughs, sat down near her. She became very uneasy, however, as night approached. She was thinking how to escape, when the Prince left her to search for some water. While he was gone she stole away, and safely reached the cottage. The Prince returned as soon as he had found a spring, and sought her everywhere, but in vain; so he returned to the cottage and related to his friend the adventure with the hind, accusing her of ingratitude. Becafigue laughed, and advised him to punish her when he had the chance. Daylight returned, and the Princess resumed her form of the white hind, and





hid herself far away in the forest. She was just fancying herself quite safe, when she caught sight of the Prince. She instantly fled, but as she was crossing a path, he lodged an arrow in her leg, when her strength failed her, and she fell. The Prince came up and was greatly grieved to see the hind bleeding. He gathered some herbs, bound them round her leg, and made her a new bed of branches. He placed the hind's head upon his knees, and lavished caresses upon her. At last the time arrived for returning to the old woman's; he lifted up his game, but he felt that without assistance he could not get his captive home, so he bound her with ribands to the foot of a tree, and went to look for Becafigue. The hind tried in vain to escape, when Giroflée passed by the spot where she was struggling, and set her free just as the Prince and Becafigue arrived and claimed her. "My lord," replied Giroflée, "this hind belonged to me before she did to you. I would much sooner lose my life than her." Upon this the Prince generously gave her up.

They returned to the cottage, and the Prince went in shortly after and inquired who the young woman was. The old dame replied that she did not know; but Becafigue said he knew she had lived with Princess Désirée, and being determined to convince himself, he set to work and made a hole in the partition large enough to perceive them. Giroflée was binding up the Princess's arm, from which the blood was flowing. They both appeared much distressed. "Alas!" said the Princess, "must I become a hind every day, and see him to whom I am betrothed without being able to speak to him!" Becafigue was astonished. He ran for the Prince, who looked through the aperture, and immediately recognised the Princess. Without delay he knocked gently at the door, Giroflée opened it, and the Prince threw himself at the feet of Désirée.

"What!" exclaimed he, "is it you whom I wounded under the form of a white hind?" He was so afflicted that Désirée assured him it was a mere trifle; she spoke to him so kindly that he could not doubt her love for him. He was explaining in his turn the trick that Longue-épine and her mother had played him, when a shrill noise of trumpets echoed through the forest. The Prince looked out of the window and recognised his own colours and standards, and catching sight of his father's litter, ran to it, and told the King of his fortunate meeting with the real Princess.

All this was brought about by the Fairy Tulip. The pretty house in the wood was hers, and she herself was the old woman. The army was ordered to march back again. The Prince and Princess were received in the capital with shouts of joy; everything was prepared for the nuptials, which were rendered more solemn by the presence of the six fairies; and Becafigue was married to Giroflée at the same time.



The

HIND





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-PICTURE BOOKS-



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